From: Globe Business
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Subject: Talking Points: Gov. Baker weighs test of off-peak toll discounts [Presented by Blue Hills Bank]
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Talking Points

Good afternoon and welcome to Talking Points for Thursday, July 19.

Chesto Means Business

Peak pricing on the Pike: Anyone stuck in Mass. Pike traffic might empty out their wallets in return for freedom.

Commuters in many other cities already have that option: Tolls that vary by time of day are increasingly being put to use elsewhere, as transponders replace toll-collectors. But congestion pricing hasn't been tried here yet.

That might change. Legislative leaders just included language in their new state budget that would test congestion pricing -- along the Pike, the tunnels, or the Tobin Bridge. The program would provide 25 percent-plus discounts to spur certain commuters to drive in off-peak hours, with a goal of reducing traffic in peak times.

One twist: This test couldn't result in toll increases for other drivers, unlike many similar programs. That could mean as much as $100,000 in foregone revenue -- depending on the number of participants, the location and time of the pilot, and the size of the discount. The legislation leaves these variables up to the state Department of Transportation.

Now it's Governor Charlie Baker's turn. The party line: He will carefully review any legislation that comes to his desk. But Baker sounded skeptical in a WAAF radio interview today. He says a modest discount would do little to change commuting patterns, and he's opposed to any big disparities in toll prices. He didn't take issue with the description of this idea as a "tax grab." Yes, the state would take in less money now. But a congestion-pricing system might be used to raise revenue for roads and mass transit down the line.

Chris Dempsey, of Transportation for Massachusetts, remains undaunted. Just getting some cars off the road at rush hour makes a big difference, he says, as evidenced by the faster flow in summer months. Baker knows people are frustrated with all the gridlock. But if he vetoes this plan, we may have to settle for vacations to serve as our relief valve for now.

Jon Chesto is a Globe reporter. Reach him at jon.chesto@globe.com and follow him on Twitter @jonchesto.

Executive Summary

Wynn/loss in court: A Superior Court judge has denied Mohegan Sun's request to add sexual misconduct allegations against Steve Wynn to its lawsuit seeking to block Wynn Resorts' local casino license. Mohegan has long argued that the Massachusetts Gaming Commission improperly awarded the Boston-area license to Wynn Resorts instead of Mohegan. The Connecticut tribal authority recently said the commission's failure to uncover the accusations against the company's founder -- they came to light earlier this year in The Wall Street Journal -- shows it gave Wynn Resorts favorable treatment. But Steve Wynn has left, and the commission is reevaluating whether the company is suitable to hold its gaming license. Superior Court Judge Janet Sanders essentially said it's too early to add these allegations to Mohegan's lawsuit against the commission until its review is done. Mohegan did get the clearance to add some other details to its complaint, however.

More casino news: Brockton Mayor Bill Carpenter headed to Washington to lobby against a bill backed by Senator Elizabeth Warren and Representative Bill Keating that would clear the way for the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe to open a casino in Taunton. Carpenter wants a casino in his city, with a different development partner. (It's unlikely both would be built, given the cities' proximity.) He said Brockton badly needs the tax revenue, and he worries that the bill under consideration is giving the tribe special treatment. (Washington Times)

Seeing green: A hotel workers union is battling with local hotels over "green options" that allow customers to opt out of housekeeping, ostensibly to help the environment. Unite Here Local 26 says it's all about the Benjamins, not the trees: These programs, the union argues, are just cost-

cutting measures in disguise that reduce hours for housecleaners. In particular, the union is focusing its ire on Marriott International's "Make a Green Choice" program, which encourages guests to opt out of housekeeping at eight of its 18 properties in Boston. Read more here.

So house proud: There's a new crop of venture-backed startups hoping to make money by betting on real estate values -- by offering "equity sharing" with homeowners. Entrepreneurs say they serve an unmet need for homeowners who want to capitalize on their homes without selling or making monthly loan payments. But some in the industry worry that these ventures raise concerns that they will amount to a workaround to bypass tight lending standards. Read more here.

Packing his bottles: Boston Beer chief marketing officer Jon Potter is resigning as of July 31. Dave Burwick, the relatively new chief executive at Boston Beer, said Potter has made "significant contributions" to the marketing team and the overall organization. After two years of weekly commuting from western Connecticut, Burwick said, Potter has decided to leave Boston Beer to spend more time with his family. The maker of Sam Adams beers created the CMO position with Potter's hire two years ago, and the company is initiating a search for a new CMO immediately.

What happened elsewhere: Disney empire will grow with Comcast out of bidding for Fox programs (AP). New York City is requiring Airbnb to share host info (Bloomberg). Chinese bike-sharing startup cycles out of many US cities (CNN Money). Krispy Kreme cooks up a cookie deal (CNBC).

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